

Theresa Utton-Jerman

Subject: FY21 Budget Public Hearing

Dear Legislators,

I appreciate the opportunity to offer my appreciation for your support of Farm to School in Vermont to this point, to share my experience and hopes for Farm to School and to appeal to you for continued funding.

My name is Karyl Kent, I am the Director of School Nutrition for Lamoille North Supervisory Union, I am the incoming president of The School Nutrition Association of Vermont and I have been involved and passionate about Farm to School over the past 12 years of my career in School Nutrition.

We know that we need \$500,000 each year in the Farm to School and Early Education program.

For FY 21, we are asking that you please support the Governor's request for funding to keep the program going, and also please consider adding an additional \$100,000 to the Farm to School grant program from the Coronavirus Relief Funding. These extra funds would help schools and early education programs respond to the demands placed on us from the pandemic.

This would include equipment, materials and supplies for school nutrition programs and classrooms including improvements for outdoor learning spaces, equipment for processing, packaging, storing and serving meals safely (i.e. meal carts or vacuum sealers), learning kits for remote classes etc...

When schools closed in March and School Nutrition Teams were deemed essential workers, we shifted gears and immediately began serving meals remotely. Almost as soon, schools across the country were faced with another effect of the crisis, food shortages. Products that were necessary to meet regulations were soon scarce from commercial suppliers. Fresh produce was left standing in commercial farm fields unable to be harvested.

In Vermont, many schools including Lamoille North were able to carry on because of our local farm connections developed through Farm to School programs. In Lamoille we served fresh carrots, potatoes, lettuces, radishes, apples, cucumbers and much more. Our response was due to systems and equipment put in place through strategic Farm to School action planning, having been recipients of Farm to School funding. We served approximately 175,000 meals in our district from March 18 - Aug 14th. Our local food partners also made it possible for us to distribute 1,594 lbs of free local produce to families in our communities.

As we move into the new school year, it is imperative that Farm to School programs continue so that all Vermont Schools and Early Education programs have opportunities to develop programs that can sustain their nutrition services, local farmers and keep dollars in the local economy.

At Lamoille North we are developing safe and healthy protocol to provide field trips to our GMTCC Sustainable Ag farm that would give our students and teachers an opportunity to get off campus and into the fresh open air of Robtoy Farm, again with funds from our F2S grant we have a coordinator dedicated to student education to build this system.

We have elementary students who cannot wait to go to high school on the farm!

In conclusion I ask that you please support the Governor's request for funding for Farm to School and please consider an additional \$100,000 to the Farm to School grant program so Vermont schools can develop programs that will put local foods on childrens' plates, support our farmers and help our struggling economies. Thank you for your time and consideration,
Karyl Kent

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Karyl Kent
President Elect, SNA-VT
Director of Nutritional Services
Lamoille North Modified Unified
Union School District

Food is not just fuel. Food is about family, food is about community, food is about identity. And we nourish all those things when we eat well.

Michael Pollan